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Secretary: ..... 25<sup>th</sup> July 2003

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs  
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

**Re: Inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation**

I am a mother of three well balanced, healthy children, now aged 17, 14 and 6. I have been separated from the father twice. The first separation was between 1990 -1993, reconciled in late 1993 and final separation (now divorced) in January 1998.

Let me say, that I think it is very important for a child to have a male role model (i.e. the child's father) involved in their upbringing. This unfortunately was not the case in our situation. During the first separation the children were aged 4 and 16 months. The father left the matrimonial home and spent very little time with the children. He would pick them up fortnightly approx. 7.30 pm on a Friday night, take them to his parent's home and return them on Saturday morning (10.00am) or approx 2.00 in the afternoon, depending on what plans he had for the weekend. The children or I had no phone contact or address apart from the paternal grandparents.

In January 1998, the children were aged 12, 9 and 16 months. At the time we were running a café business and again the father left the matrimonial home and the only contact that the children and I had was the business phone number, no after hours contact apart from the paternal grandparents. Although we were separated, I was also working in the café until September 1998, whereby I would take the children to the café with me and the father would take them out from there. At times he would say he was going to be there and I would take all three children with me and he would not turn up. He would not go out of his way to pick up the children – if I didn't take them to the café he would not see them sometimes for 6 weeks or more. This continued and it has got to the point where the children are not interested in seeing or having any contact with him at all.

Some 'fathers' are responsible parents but there are others who are not and to give equal parenting rights to both would create a lot of instability in the children's lives. Since separating in 1998 I have strived to maintain a stable environment for the children despite the 'rollercoaster' life I lived with the father. He still lives that lifestyle and the children would have been dragged through this.

Now that the children are older they do recall the brief contact visits that they had with their father – he would take them to the TAB and they would play games in the TAB, who could find the ticket with the highest bid or he would leave them in the car, and when he finished he would take them to Time Zone (games parlour) on the condition that they did not tell me that they had been to the TAB.

As a result of his gambling habits and infidelities we lost the matrimonial home, car & business. I was to spend 4 years living with my parents to keep the children comfortable and stable until I was able to move out on my own with the children.

Given the lifestyle, gambling habits and number of relationships that the father has continued since separation I do not believe that it would be in the best interest of the children to spend equal time with each parent. They would not be the well balanced happy children that they are today. They would have had to endure a very unstable upbringing if this was the case. You must bring up children with good morals and values for them to be good citizens, not bringing them up with lies and deceit.

Factors that should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their children post separation are:

- how much time the parents spent with them before separation - e.g. If I was to go somewhere and ask him to look after the children I would come home and there would not be anybody home, he would have taken them to my Mum's or sister's and left
- Responsibility, reliability and honesty of parent
- Lifestyle, e.g. addictive habits

The existing child support system does not work fairly for those who like to blackmail and manipulate the system. I would take the children to the father, but once he started putting a price on contact visits I could no longer take them to him. I then left it up to him to pick them up – and he really could not make the effort. He has not paid any child support to me (arrears in excess of \$28,000), despite the fact that he owns and operates a café/restaurant that has weekly takings of \$ 22,000. The system may work for those that want to do the right thing by their children but for those that don't they find all the loop holes and get away with it for many years.

Sometimes I feel there are no justice, and the guilty just keep on living an affluent life with no responsibilities, while the mother and children struggle and juggle finances to pay for food, education and day to day living expenses.